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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

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A PLAY OF JUDITH

An incomplete play of "Holofernes," in Latin and English, is found in Hengwrt and Peniarth ms. 508, at the National Library of Wales.¹ The play begins at the top of page 3, and ends at the middle of page 9, the lower half of the sheet being torn away. The original Latin, which proves to be a copy of a portion of the play of *Judith* by Cornelius Schonæus² is written on the even pages; the English translation is on the odd pages. The bottom of the eighth page, for the space of about five lines, is blank. Also, so far as one can judge, the lower half of the ninth page was left blank, so that it would appear that the translator gave up his task at this point. The translation includes the title and the names of the *dramatis personae*, the prologue, and a part of the first speech of Holofernes. Of that speech, the last twelve lines translated were not copied in Latin. The Latin text is written stichically in an Italian hand, while the translation is written as prose³ and in the national hand.

¹ Professor Carleton Brown called my attention to the ms. It is referred to in *Hist. MSS. Com. Rep.* II, Appendix, p. 106, as belonging to the 16th century. Wynne in *Arch. Camb.*, Ser. IV, vol II, p. 118, assigns it to the 17th century. I am obliged to Mr. John Ballinger, the Librarian of the National Library, for having a rotograph made of the ms.

² The ms. deviates in orthography, especially in the matter of doubling consonants, from the printed versions of the Latin which I have been able to examine.

³ I am indebted to Professor Brown for calling my attention to the fact that the translation is in unrhymed verse, and for much information concerning the 16th century movement for classical metres in English. I have supplied capital letters at the beginning of the lines, but have adhered to the ms. capitalisation in all other cases.

[page 3] IVDITHA · AVCTORVM ⁴ NOMIN[A]

HO : MOR : AMMO : AC : THRA :

LA : BA : | OZI : IOA : SA :

MEL : AZA : IV : AB : ⁵

PROLOGUS

Trimetri ⁶ Jambi.

O yee most worshipfull and gentle citisones,
 All haile vnto you, whosoever of you came hether
 To see theese plesaunt and ioifull commedies
 Hou[ld?] on I will not stay you here with any longe speach
 But whatsoever wee are aboute to do wee wi[ll] declare vnto you
 A commedie beinge in *presens* with few wordes.
 But who is he which made this commedie,
 It is one ⁷ sconeys a master of our scoole,
 For he purposed to shew this his industrie vnto you
 Afore this time now he declareth an other commedie,
 It is not vaine but also holy and godly
 Taken out of the holy bible. And what vacaiuite,
 Ever he had, the scoleres beinge absente
 He wi[ll]ingly applied all that time vnto this studie.
 And he thinketh his laboure not to be vnprofitable
 Vnto himself nor vnto you vnacceptabl[e]
 If you would dedicate your mindes ether vnto
 Divine learninge or vnto politike artes,
 Ffor evenas he confesseth, his commedie
 To bee far differinge from the stile and phrase ⁸
 Of aunc[i]ente Poetes, so if ⁹ there be any losse

⁴ A mistake for *Actorvm*.

⁵ The full names of the *dramatis personae* as given in the printed texts are:—Holofernes, imperator Assyriorum; Moabus and Ammonides, duces militum; Achior, Ammonites; Thraso and Labrax, milites Assyrij; Ba-goas, cubicularius Holofernis; Ozias, Consul Betuliensis; Ioachimvs, summus sacerdos; Sadocos, Melchias and Azarias, cives Betulienses; Juditha, vidua; Abra, Judithae ancilla. The perpendicular line after Ba[goas] seems to mark a division between the Assyrians and the Israelites.

⁶ MS. *Trimeti*.

⁷ *on* has been deleted from the line and *one* written above.

⁸ MS. *phase*.

⁹ *of* seems to have been altered to *if*, and a letter has been written above and blotted.

Or b[reak]inge herin let evrie man iudg of it as they wi[ll]
 For here is no thinge ¹⁰ [page 5] which is eather absurde or dishoneste,

Or any thinge vnworthy to be harde, but only
 Chaste honest and godly, which you are aboute to heare
 Wherby you shall trie all things wether they be trew or not.
 And so there be no learned men wantinge
 Which will reade and allow his commedies.
 Vnto whose commedie yee seeme to obay whom I see
 Most attentiu and heedfull and givinge greate yeare hearvnto.
 Now least that any man by your iudgmente shall thinke
 Me to haue ben longe aboute ¹¹ it, if I hould
 You [¹²] heare any longe time: give yeare vnto me
 While I shew you the argumente of this commedie.

The argument of the commedie.

Holefernes a captaine of the Asirienes
 Mightie in war and doinge many noble actes, compaste
 The citie Betulia with great siege, the citiesones beinge
 Seperated on from an other by theire strengthe ¹³ desired
 Aide of god. then they beinge vexed with scarsnes of water sayd
 They would yeeld to theire enimies vnlesse in five daies god
 Would help them, as soone as this came ¹⁴ unto Juditha her eare
 She consulted with Ozia her lifte tenaunte.
 Herevpon she beinge brethed by hevenly powers ¹⁵ by night
 And tooke her hande maide with her, and wente to the hostes of
 her enimies:
 [page 7] And shee moste craftily deceved Holefernes by her
 fained decietes.¹⁶
 Whom after he beinge ov[er]whelmed by over much drinkinge¹⁷
 of wine immoderatly
 When shee had kut of his heade and brought it to the citie, by
 and by
 The enimies fled away beinge frightened with greate feare.

¹⁰ Half the line has been left blank in order that the English might correspond to the Latin on the following page.

¹¹ *u* written above.

¹⁵ *r* written above the *s*.

¹² *with* deleted.

¹⁶ *i* written above.

¹³ MS. *strenghe*.

¹⁷ MS. *drinkinke*.

¹⁴ *came* repeated in the MS.

Then the Izaralites havinge gotten the victorie gave greate ¹⁸
praise vnto god.

The firste acte and scene. Holefer

Moabus ¹⁹, Iambi [²⁰] senarij et septenarij.

By Iubiter it is [²¹] graunted vnto me for whatsoever

I do it happeneth vnto me most prosperously.

For into what parte soever of the worlde I goe

With my armie I *presently* rise great feare & tremblinge.

Nether is there any citie any wheare or region

Valiaunte in armie which kan resiste againste mee. for all men

As soone as they heare me to have co[m]men [²²] somewhat neare
vnto them

By & by they *com* vnto me: and will yeld vnto me

Both themselves theire regiones goodes & armes vpon which they
put their truste

& daily resistinge againste them and will ever do it ²³

[page 9] They giue & yeeld them selves vnto me wi[llin]gly:

And in all respectes obainge my [²⁴] *praeceptes* & *commaunde-*
ments.

By obtaininge the which thinges ²⁵ truly so happily and valiauntly

I thinke I shall obtaine greate praise and gorgeouse [²⁶] rewarde

As I haue hether vnto gotten wonderfull greate renowne

And glorie for my selfe and my posteritie

Sith that this is the only way for noble and princelike men,

Wherby they may never droune nor leese their eternall honor

And glorie, when the fame of slothfull ²⁷ men and cowarde

Dishonestly decaith with the life which dishonestlie

I know I have avoided hether vnto and

I hope I ²⁸

The original play was the work of Cornelius Schonæus, Rector of Haarlem at the end of the 16th century. He was well-known during his lifetime as the author of a number of sacred comedies

¹⁸ *a* written above.

¹⁹ *a* written above.

²⁰ *s* deleted.

²³ *it* comes in the middle of the line. The rest of the line is left blank.

²⁴ *pre* deleted.

²⁷ *ms. shothfull.*

²⁵ A letter is deleted between *i* and *n*.

²⁸ Here the page has been torn.

²⁶ *l* deleted.

in imitation of Terence, on account of which he was often described as the "Christian Terence."²⁹ Foppens mentions *Judithae constantia* as one of a number of Schönaeus's plays which were printed separately at Antwerp between 1570 and 1578, and in one volume at Cologne in 1614. *Juditha* is found in at least three other editions:—Haarlem, 1592; Antwerp 1598; and Cologne, 1604, all volumes containing six plays. Dr. Herford³⁰ points out that Schönaeus was well-known in England and that "three at least of his seventeen plays were reprinted in London almost as soon as they appeared."³¹ A footnote refers to a volume containing *Tobaeus*, *Juditha* and *Pseudostratiotes*, printed in London in 1595. The present version is interesting as an additional piece of evidence for the influence of the school-masters of the Low Countries on English Literature during the 16th century.

Even more interesting is the attempt of the translator to reproduce the *senarii* and *septenarii* of his original, for the fragment is thus connected with the whole literary school that strove to regulate English verse according to the rules of classical prosody. The first efforts to conform strictly to Latin quantity, and to ignore the accent of the spoken language, were soon found impracticable. The later metrists, while still endeavoring as much as possible to follow the classical rules, insisted that accentuation must primarily determine the form of English verse. Moreover, the ear, rather than the eye, was to be the test of rhythm. On the whole, the present attempt is to be classified with the works of the early reformers, inasmuch as English accentuation is frequently ignored for the sake of the quantity of the vowels. Thus in the following words, the accented syllable is made short, while the unaccented syllable is long owing to the position of the vowel before two consonants:—*laboure not, tenaunt, dishonēste*. When it happens, however, that two long syllables are required by the metre, the accented vowel is then made long even though it may be short according to position, e. g.:—*unaccēptāble, cōmpāste, prēsēns, ābsēnte, iūdgmēnte*. In one case *cītīsōnes* is found with two long syllables, in another *cītīsōnes* with the accented syllable short. It must be noted, on

²⁹ Jean François Foppens: *Bibliotheca Belgica*, ed. 1739, p. 218.

³⁰ *Literary Relations of England and Germany*, p. 94.

³¹ In making this statement, Dr. Herford seems to be referring to the edition of 1592 rather than to the one mentioned by Foppens as having been published 1570-1578.

the other hand, that vowels which are long by position, and even diphthongs, are occasionally short if they are unaccented, e. g., *a* in *ābsūrde*. The author's treatment of short *e* and *i* as separate syllables before other vowels illustrates yet more clearly that he followed the grammar-school rules of scansion, e. g.:—*Asirīēnes*, *scōnēūs*, *Oziā*. It may be noted that the quantities of the Latin case endings are preserved in the last two examples, *-ūs* and *-ā* (ablative after the preposition *with*). But most significant of all, perhaps, is the fact that the ending *-ie* is with very few exceptions regarded as a diphthong and made long, e. g.:—*commēdiē*, *stūdiē*, *citiē*, *evriē*; and in two examples, *godlȳ* and *onlyȳ*, the rule has been extended to include the same sound when it is spelt with *-y*. Usually a digraph makes a preceding vowel long, e. g.:—*cōnfēssēth*; similarly the ending *-inge* is regularly long in *bēinge*, *brēakinge*, *drinkinge*. This usage is more slavishly classical even than the rules to which the Areopagite School conformed, for Spenser recognised that *th* was one sound, and that *ie* was a simple vowel even though it looked like a diphthong. Somewhat more freedom has been taken in the treatment of monosyllables. Usually unaccented or lightly accented monosyllables are short, even when the rules of position require them to be long, e. g.:—*ānd* (but *ānd* is also found), *mōst*, *in presens*, *ōf thē hōly*. Conversely, if the verse requires the monosyllable to be long, it is made long, although the vowel is flanked by single consonants, without regard to the strength of the accent, e. g.:—*to dō*, *be nō learned*. Nevertheless, in spite of such deviations, the translator of *Judith* has modelled his prosody fairly strictly on the basis of his Latin Grammar, although his native pronunciation at times has become stronger than the rules.

To judge from its unfinished condition, and the halting character of its style, this version of the *Judith* was a school exercise. Some confirmation of this conjecture is found in the fact that the same manuscript contains a "Cato construed by Corderius, Latin and English."³² Finally, it is to be observed that the connection of this piece of translation with the schools is quite in accord with the generally accepted view that the schools supplied the main channel through which the Netherlands influenced English literature.

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³² See Wynne's description in *Arch. Camb.* cited above, n. 1.